The difficulty of finding qualified special education personnel is not unique to Wyoming. According to studies sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, there continue to be persistent nationwide shortages of qualified special education teachers and service providers. Ninety-eight percent of the nation’s school districts report special education teacher shortages, while the number of students with disabilities continues to grow at rates almost three times greater than the overall student population. In particular, studies indicate that the United States has had a chronic and growing shortage of qualified teachers for students with visual impairments since the 1980s. (Dunlap, 2008)

To assist districts for the growing demand of qualified teachers for the Visually Impaired, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Deaf-Blind Educators, and Teachers for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, WDE Deaf-Blind Project partnered with Texas Tech. University to provide an opportunity for local teachers, educators and therapists to attain a degree in the following fields:

- Teacher for the Visually Impaired
- Orientation & Mobility Instructor
- Deaf-Blind Educator
- Teacher for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing

Wyoming has been granted 5 slots in each discipline—for two different sessions. Reserve your spot soon! For more detailed information contact Joanne Whitson, jwhits@educ.state.wy.us or toll free at 877.875.9467.

Wyoming First Step Diagnostic Clinic
October 17, 2008—Reserve your Spot Now!

The Wyoming First Step Diagnostic Clinic is a transdisciplinary assessment for students in Wyoming — Birth through 21 years of age with any disability. The Clinic offers: assessment, intervention, research based best practices on the newest strategies and recommendations, medical information and intervention. This information can be used to determine new goals for the IEP/IFSP, offer recommendations on existing goals, validate current programming and assist with the 3-year evaluation. For more information on the Clinic go to www.k12.wy.us/svi/index.html or contact Joanne Whitson.
Shared reading is a technique that emphasizes conversation between a child and the reader about different aspects of the story. This powerful technique can account for at least 10% of the variance among reading and non-reading children (Ezell & Justice, 2005). Good shared reading supports children to ask and answer questions and to make comments about each page of a book. Effective shared reading also includes readers who can ask appropriate questions, wait for answers, and who make comments and connections regarding the story and the print on each page to meaningful words and events in the child’s life (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

Children were more likely to interact with books and participate during shared reading if we made books out of materials that reflected the children’s sensory interests. We added text to the books related to the children, their friends, and their family interests. The following offers descriptions of how to make some of the books that we have found children with significant disabilities to enjoy and explore during shared reading.

Several children with cognitive, motor, and sensory impairments with whom we have worked, seemed to enjoy squeezing “squishy” materials such as play-dough, putty, and even their diapers. We used this interest to make “squishy books” to give the children appropriate options to explore their interests, to learn to turn pages, and to participate in shared reading. As children make comments, or adults could come up with simple phrases related to the pages in the book, these comments are written on “sticky notes” and attached to each page and used as text.

Shared Reading Sensory Books: Increase Student Literacy Participation

**Ingredients:**

- Several heavy-duty, freezer-quality, Ziploc bags (1 quart size)
- “Squishy” materials such as alcohol-free hair gel (variety of colors), hand-lotion (with and without glitter), “gak” (water and corn starch with food coloring), vegetable oil and food coloring, sand, dirt, paper strips-packaging materials, etc.
- Small plastic letters, objects
- Clear packaging tape

**Shared Reading: Directions to Make Squishy Books**

**A sample squishy book**

Fill a Ziploc bag (page) with something “squishy”. Before closing the bag, add small objects like plastic animals and plastic letters that might spell the name of the animal into the bag. Zip it shut. After filling several bags, tape the zippered-parts together with packaging tape to make a book. Usually 3-4 pages can be securely taped together. Now you have a book that a student can enjoy while using a multitude of senses.

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Fun Books for SHARED Reading
Patsy Pierce, Ph. D. The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Animal food books: Pages filled with different types of animal foods, (e.g., dry dog food, dry cat food, bird seed, hay) and with the logo/label from the food container. You may have to use a sample-size of the animal food to have the right size of the label/logo to put in the baggie with the food.

Breakfast food books: Pages filled with different types of cereal along with the label/logo from the box of cereal. It is helpful to use “snack-size” boxes of cereal in order to have the right size label to put in each bag. White paper strips could also be added as “milk” for the cereal. We found that puncturing the bags with a needle in several places help the pages to remain flat.

Sand books: Pages filled with sand, seashells, sea-horses, and letters to spell these words. Children with visual impairments often seemed to interact more with these books when glitter was mixed with the sand.

Dirt books: Pages filled with potting soil, plastic insects, worms, and letters to spell related words.

ABC book: Pages filled with a plastic letter and small objects starting with that letter, (e.g., B, bug, baby, ball). The pages also have a fun substance in them like hair gel.

Name book: Each page has a plastic letter and items that begin with that letter from a child’s name, (e.g., P, pig, next page, A-ant, next page, T-tiger, next page, S-soap, last page, Y-yellow gel). All pages have different fun squishy stuff in them.

Wallpaper/Fabric Sample Books
Wallpaper/Fabric Sample books are made from old sample books by gluing objects, pictures, and text on each page. These books are heavy enough to remain stable for ease in page turning and hold up to much moisture and rough usage. The colors and textures are interesting to many children.

Children enjoying wall paper and fabric sample books
Photo provided by Patsy Pierce

Learning Media Assessment & Functional Vision Assessments Offered by WDE

The National Braille Press has created a national children’s Braille literacy program to encourage families with blind children to read print/Braille books together. The Read Books! Program is giving away bags containing: An age-appropriate print/Braille book (birth– 7 years) in English or Spanish:
- A Braille primer for sighted parents
- A colorful print/Braille place mat
- Print/Braille bookmarks
- A guide for parents on why and how to read books with their young blind child

One of the first questions asked about a child’s learning is what his/her primary reading medium will be. Teachers and parents may be uncertain as to whether a child should learn Braille, rely on large print, auditory modalities or use regular print for accessing reading material. The purpose of the Learning Media Assessment, LMA, is to determine the most effective medium for accessing instruction and teaching methods. A certified teacher of students with visual impairments completes this assessment. The LMA covers both general learning media and literacy media. One of the first areas to be examined is the student’s ability to use their vision. This can be determined through a Functional Vision Assessment, FVA. This is of special importance when programming for students with visual impairments. Successfully educating these students depends upon access to accurate, current information about each child’s use of his/her vision. The FVA complements information available from an ophthalmologist or optometrist regarding medical diagnosis, care, prognosis, and health of the visual system.

In order to assist districts with performing these mandatory assessments, WDE will be piloting a Low Vision Assessment/ Functional Vision Assessment and learning Media Assessment as part of the Wyoming First Step Diagnostic Clinic. The first assessments will be held during the Spring Clinic. If you are interested, contact Joanne Whitson, 877-875-9467.

Websites in the Spotlight

- A gift coupon redeemable for another print/Braille book or Braille/large print playing cards
- Print / Braille magnetic Letters

To request your bag and learn more about the importance of emergent literacy in early childhood for children with vision impairments, visit their website:
Wyoming Department of Education, Deaf-Blind Project
Carbon Building Room 325
215 West Buffalo
Rawlins, WY 82301

Phone: 307.324.5333 or Toll Free 877.875.9675
Fax: 307.324.3743

Finding Answers Together

Wyoming Awarded the Deaf-Blind Grant 2008—2013

The mission of the Wyoming Deaf-Blind Project is to ensure that all students in Wyoming who are deaf-blind receive the appropriate support and tools enabling them to achieve both academic success to improve results in school and go on to become contributing members of their community. In order to meet this mission, the project focuses on better identifying children birth through 21 years of age who are deaf-blind; provide a comprehensive array of technical assistance, information, training and support throughout Wyoming to families, support staff, educators, early interventionists, aids and therapists in activities that are supported by scientifically based research for working with children who are deaf-blind and engage in ongoing leadership and collaboration with state and national agencies. For more information on the grant contact Joanne Whitson, 877.875.9467.

For more information on Shared Reading or literacy strategies—April 23–25, 2009 Western Regional Early Intervention Conference! Watch the web for information, www.k12.wy.us/svi/index.html

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